

3 The Resistance

Broadly speaking, the struggle against national domination in South Africa can be sub-divided into three phases: the wars of resistance; the pre-1960 responses to conquest; and the current phase, in which the armed perspective is once again part of the drive for liberation.

THE WARS OF RESISTANCE

First contacts between the indigenous people and foreigners were not always hostile. Trade in ivory, cattle and labour in exchange for European commodities took place. The use of land by white farmers, sometimes contractually arranged with the Chiefs in the name of their people, was permitted in the spirit of indigenous custom which excluded Western concepts of individual ownership of property.

But even these relations of commercial intercourse were always one-sided and fragile. The 'new civilization' tolerated the politics of coexistence as long as it made possible unequal exchange, willing surrender by the tribes of the best pasture lands, and supplies of near-slave labour. Punitive military expeditions always hovered in the background as a reserve weapon for the continuation of colonial politics by war. In the century between 1779 and 1879, history tells of ten major wars of indigenous resistance to foreign control. But 'between these bloody armed clashes (and even before the first 'official' war in 1779), settler expansionism into the interior was accompanied by numerous guerrilla skirmishes.

By 1770, the systematic extermination of the San hunter (in so-called 'bushman' country abutting the Cape settlement in the north-east) was already well advanced.

On the Eastern Cape frontier, warfare between settler raiding parties and the Xhosa tribes raged intermittently. The Xhosas, with a more advanced social system based on cattle breeding, and agriculture, and more effective military organization and traditions, made a less easy prey than the San for the marauding settler bands. The *King William's Town Gazette* of 14 August 1856 said of the Xhosas: 'We have observed, in connection with the native character, that lean and starving men are always tractable and civil, but the well-fed and sleek, impudent and easily led to mischief.'¹

This 'impudence and mischief' put a heavy price on the conquest. The saga of Xhosa resistance over a long period of time was heroic in its proportions. But the ultimate crushing of the resistance was perhaps historically inevitable. Not only did the colonists possess overwhelming military resources (grapeshot against the spear); but in the age-old tradition of 'divide and rule', they were able to play on tribal divisions.

The Xhosa version of the conflict is not yet fully recorded. However, the Xhosa grasp of the issues involved is impressively described in a British soldier's account of an address by a Xhosa counsellor to the English commander, Colonel Willshire, after the Xhosa defeat in the fifth War

of Resistance (1818-19). The counsellor was part of a group which had come to offer itself in exchange for the defeated Xhosa leader, Makana, imprisoned on Robben Island for life.

'The war, British Chiefs, is an unjust one. You are striving to extirpate a people whom you forced to take up arms.' Initial contact between the settlers and Xhosas was friendly and warm until the herds of the Xhosas increased so as to make the hearts of the Boers sore. What those covetous men could not get from our fathers for old buttons, they took by force. Our fathers were men; they loved their cattle, their wives; their wives and children live upon milk; they fought for their property. They began to hate the colonists who coveted their all and aimed at their destruction ... If we had succeeded; our right was good, for you began the war. We failed and you are here.¹²

On this occasion, some 3,000 square miles of Xhosa land and 30,000 head of cattle constituted the cost of the failure. Makana was to drown off Blaauwberg beach in an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the prison island which today, once again, keeps African resistance leaders under lock and key.

In other parts of the sub-continent, the story was the same. North of the Orange River, the independent Griqua states fell to the Boer conquest of the 1860s. Sotho resistance under Moshweshwe I - a general in the Shaka mould and a statesman of great talent - was also fierce. Before his death in 1870 the Basotho had retained a measure of independence under British 'protection' which eventually prevented the incorporation of their remaining lands into the Union of South Africa. The new Boer Republics in the North found the process of subduing the existing African traditional societies costly. The Pedi under Sekhukhune in the East and the Setswana in the West fiercely resisted the land grabbing and labour hunting. And it was not until 1898 that the South African Republic succeeded in defeating the Venda.

The great Zulu kingdom in the end also succumbed to overwhelming force, - but not without a struggle which became legendary. Under Dingiswayo it had begun the welding of the tribal factions into nationhood. This was already well advanced by the mid-nineteenth century.*

**It was undoubtedly accompanied by inter-tribal war and attendant cruelties. Racist historians who attempt to denigrate the process by harping on the atrocities not only exaggerate the element of violence but also, more often than not, conveniently omit comparison with the savage destruction of both life and property- which surrounded nation-building in Europe and elsewhere.*

In Zululand, as in the Eastern Cape, the colonists originally hoped to achieve their territorial ambitions through the lure of trinkets. Simon van der Stel sent a galliot to Port Natal (now Durban) with instructions to purchase 'that bay with some surrounding land from the King and Chief of those parts for some merchandise consisting of copper arm and neck rings and other articles'. Later, when war rather than commerce became the instrument of settler expansionism, the cohesion of the Zulus and their advanced military techniques (pioneered by Shaka) made them a formidable foe.

It was not the so-called 'war-like' Zulu chiefs who chose armed confrontation. The events leading to the tenth war of resistance in 1879 without a doubt demonstrate settler intentions

to provoke a conflict in order to destroy the Zulu kingdom, and the army which was its defence. The prize would not only be cattle and land, but the prospect expressed by Governor Shepstone that Zulu warriors would 'be changed to labourers working for wages'.⁴ But before the change was enforced, these warriors gave more than a good account of themselves.

At the battle of Isandhlawana in 1879, Europe's foremost army, with modern breech-loading guns, sustained a military defeat at the hands of Zulu soldiers with stabbing spears. Before the battle, when the British intention to destroy Zulu power had become crystal clear to him, Cetshwayo told a messenger who brought an ultimatum from the British: 'Go back and tell the English, that I shall now act on my own account and if they wish me to argue I shall become a wanderer but I shall not go without having acted.'⁵

In the end, having acted, Cetshwayo became a 'wanderer'. After a successful British assault on his stronghold at Ulundi, he was tracked down in the Ngomi forest and banished from his kingdom.

The scene was thus set for the fulfilment of Shepstone's dream. Zululand was split into thirteen parts under separate chiefs salaried by the government. New tax laws were promulgated, designed to force the Zulu warrior to offer himself as a labourer to settler farmers: a device soon to be followed by administrations in other parts, of Southern Africa. This provoked the final episode of old-style resistance when, in 1906 in Natal, Bambata led an unsuccessful armed uprising against these taxes. To destroy the myth of Bambata's invulnerability, his head was cut off by his 'Christian' conquerors and publicly paraded.

The destruction of Bambata and his guerrillas in the Nkandla forest represents a watershed in indigenous resistance to colonial rule. Resistance of that type could no longer be sustained by traditional African tribal societies. The independent tribe with its military organization - the base of the resistance - had been destroyed throughout the whole of Southern Africa. There had been no concerted African resistance; the enemy had exploited divisions between and within the different tribes, some of whom were temporarily inveigled onto the side of the colonists, only to be destroyed in their turn when they had served their purpose; there had been an absolute disparity in weaponry. Each of these factors played a part in the ultimate defeat.

The period of imperialist primitive accumulation - so familiar in colonies throughout the world - had run its course. The usual progression from trade, through to conquest, followed by economic and political control, was complete.

A new era of political struggle opened. It began uncertainly because the core of former resistance in the countryside had been destroyed, and the new forces were not yet fully developed.

The early stages of both national and working-class struggle bore the marks of this transition. They saw the emergence of nationally orientated organizations amongst the Indian and Coloured peoples, and in 1912 the creation of the African National Congress. With the lessons of the conquest behind it, the African National Congress set itself the task of promoting a national African consciousness and of eliminating the historical hangover of tribalism and

regionalism. This was also the time when developing capitalist relations of production stimulated the growth of political and trade union organizations, which began to assert workers' interests in the economic and political spheres.

The history of the early responses of various national groups and class forces to the conquest has been set out in works by Roux (*Time Longer Than Rope*), Lerumo (*Fifty Fighting Years*) and, above all, by H. J. and R. E. Simons in their richly documented *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. It is impossible here to do more than concentrate on a number of important themes which highlight the way in which both national and class forces grappled, sometimes uncertainly, with new tasks posed by changed and continuously changing conditions.

It will be seen that, in the course of time, the attitudes of the main political organizations were radically transformed on a number of fundamental questions.

The African National Congress of today, for example, led by men like Tambo and Mandela, with an unqualified demand for people's power to be achieved by revolutionary force, is a far cry from the African National Congress of the twenties, which was still shy to challenge the roots of white supremacy, and still looked to the imperialists at Whitehall to ameliorate the conditions of Africans.

The Communist Party, too, has come a long way since its formative years and the days of the 1922 general strike. Despite efforts by communists to steer this white miners' strike away from racialism, the Communist Party nonetheless ranged itself with those forces which supported the retention of the job colour bar on the mines. But this same organization was shortly afterwards to play an important role in pioneering the concept of immediate majority rule, and in elaborating an integrated appreciation of the relationship of class to national struggle.

The same process of radicalization occurred in the organizations of the Indian minority. The early beginnings of resistance by the Indian community had been led by Mahatma Gandhi who founded the Natal and Transvaal organizations that later merged to form the South African Indian Congress. Gandhi pioneered the technique of passive resistance which was to be used so effectively in the following half-century by the whole national movement as a means of mobilization and resistance. But, like the early leaders of the African national movement Gandhi still had illusions about the nature of the British Empire and was unable to see an imperative need for all-black unity. In 1906, for example, he considered it tactically wise to side with the British in the brutal crushing of the Bambata rebellion. When the Dadoo-Naicker group won the leadership battle in the late forties, the South African Indian Congress and its constituents turned from former moderate and sectional policies to joint action with the African National Congress.

Early organizations of the Coloured people, such as the African People's Organization, also suffered similar limitations.

The partial Coloured franchise of those times, now totally abolished, proved to be more demoralizing than total disenfranchisement. Coloured politicians tended to become appendages of white parties, which denied them membership and rewarded them with scraps

of political loot'.⁶ But, by the fifties, the newly-created Coloured People's Congress was becoming an integral part of the liberation alliance.

A brief examination of a few of the main phases in the history of two of these organizations - the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress will help to relate some of their earlier ideological limitations to the realities of the period in which they occurred. It will also shed light on the mutual interaction between the national and the class movements from which evolved those strategic perspectives common to the whole liberation movement today.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY

The Communist Party held its founding conference on 30 July 1921. Like many of its counterparts, especially in Western Europe, it was constituted by those who had broken with social democracy on the question of its support for the First World War. Initially, in 1915, a small group of left-wingers, led by people like Bill Andrews, broke with the all-white South African Labour Party and formed the International Socialist League. This group, together with smaller left-wing groups, took the initiative in establishing the Party and affiliating it to the Comintern. The Party operated as a legal body until 1950, when it was declared illegal under the Suppression of Communism Act. After a lapse of three years, it reconstituted itself in clandestine conditions. The most concise and all-round definition of its theory of the South African revolution is contained in its programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*, which was adopted in 1962 at its sixth underground conference held in Johannesburg.

Between the first conference in 1921 and the programme conference in 1962, a fundamental re-shaping had taken place in the Communist approach to many of the basic problems of the South African revolution. Some of these changes were responses to a changing situation; but in the case of others, the changing situation served only to put in question some of the Party's earlier assumptions about the fundamental character of the political conflict, about the main forces for change, and about the precise character and role of the Party itself.

The composition of the delegates attending and of the leading bodies elected at these two conferences tells its own story. At the 1921 conference every delegate was white, and so was every member of the executive. At the 1962 conference the great majority of the delegates were black, and a predominantly black Central Committee was elected.

But the contrast between the main programmatic documents is equally stark. The earlier conference posited, as an immediate task, an advance to a classless society, with the industrial workers - then predominantly white - providing the 'storm troops' of the approaching revolution. The 1962 programme, however, set out a perspective of a national democratic revolution whose main content would be the liberation of the African people. Radical change must have seemed closer to the delegates in 1921, in the post-October Revolution euphoria, than it seemed in 1962. And indeed, shortly after the founding conference, the white miners on the Rand initiated a strike which developed close to insurrection, in which armed commandos took to the streets and pitched battles between them and the state's armed forces took place.

But with the benefit of hindsight there can surely be no situation more bizarre. The red flag is hoisted over the Johannesburg city hall. A huge demonstration of miners takes to the streets on 7 February 1922, led by a brass band blaring the Red Flag, and followed by a slogan which proclaimed 'Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa'. The Rand Revolt, as it became known, was sparked off by an attempt by the Chamber of Mines to ease - for its own purposes and in a limited sphere - the job colour bar on the mines. The employment of black mineworkers to do skilled or semi-skilled work was not yet prohibited by law. The 1917 *status quo* agreement between the mine owners and the white workers had fixed the ratio of white to black labour. Whilst attempting to steer the strike away from its anti-black tendencies, Communists found themselves arguing the true interests of the workers (white or black) were to defend the white monopoly of skilled work and thus to defend rates of white workers' pay which the bosses were attacking by their ploy. They declared that the leaders of what they called die 'bourgeois National Congress', by advocating the immediate removal of the colour bar, were 'playing the game of the capitalists'.⁷

The Communists were undoubtedly right in questioning the motives behind the mine-owners' attempt to dilute the colour bar. But in the absence of an alternative demand for the immediate ending of the race quotas, their actions and attitudes objectively reinforced and 'justified' the retention of the colour bar.

What explains this association of the Communists at that time with a movement whose proclaimed aim was to entrench white racial privilege at the point of production? Given their thesis of class struggle in which the national element played little or no part and given the overwhelmingly white composition of the Communist movement at that time, it is easy to understand why they thought of the white working class as *the* revolutionary force. After all, the white workers had been engaged for more than a decade in bitter class struggles against the bosses and had fought many heroic battles, occasionally with guns in hand. In contrast, the African proletariat proper was still in its formative stages. If, as they understood it, the working class was the vanguard in the struggle for socialism, who but the most articulate and most highly organized sector of the working class could be seen to fill this role? The racial prejudice of the white workers was evident; but, it was believed, the industrial system would gradually wean them away from racialism, and a truly international class consciousness would emerge in the course of struggle.

It was, of course, exceedingly difficult for these early Communists - many of them utterly selfless in the cause of socialism - to uncover the true character of the process that was taking place. The white workers had not yet won the place at the ruler's table which they have today, and their undoubted militancy was a mixture of motives and aims, that included a class hostility to capitalism. From their struggles were born the radical political movements with broadly socialist orientation which, as we have seen, led ultimately to the formation of the Communist Party of South Africa. On the other hand, the black worker had neither effective industrial organization nor a militant national consciousness or national movement which could hold out an immediate prospect of revolutionary struggle.

South African Communists were not alone in believing that on a world scale the early twenties would see a major revolutionary breakthrough. With hindsight it is easier to see that their perspective of a working-class power, based as it could only be on the white working

class, was a mistaken one. Their internationalism expressed itself in the concept of a white proletariat taking power -and then proceeding to free South Africa's oppressed nations. Rigid adherence to this concept led to political stances which, however well-intentioned, were objectively at best utopian, and at worst a pandering to white reaction.

The victory of the alliance between the white South African Labour Party and the Nationalist Party at the polls in 1924 was the real culmination of the strivings of the privilege-seeking white workers. The basic aims of the 1922 strike were given statutory recognition. The new government made vast concessions, and the process of making the white workers appendages of the ruling group in every sphere of life - economic, political and social - began in earnest. Laws were passed effectively making skilled work a right of white workers alone. A so-called 'civilized labour policy' was implemented to maintain Africans as unskilled cheap labour and to prevent the emergence of an organized African working class. Africans (i.e. all who were obliged to carry passes) were excluded from the definition of 'employee' in the new industrial legislation. This deprived them of the legal right to strike (in any industrial dispute) or to form their own registered trade unions.

The faith in the revolutionary potential of the white working class soon began to fade within the Communist movement. Those who had never really envisaged a socialism to embrace the black people withdrew from politics, or found a home in the racist Labour Party, or in a few cases in the fascist-oriented Nationalist Party. But men like Andrews - not without personal difficulty on some issues - continued to play a leading role in the Party, whose emphasis was swinging towards African liberation. By 1928, of the 1,750 members of the Communist Party, 1,600 were African.

For the first time the concept of Black Rule was advanced. James La Guma, a Coloured leader of the Communist Party, attended the 1927 Brussels conference of the League Against Imperialism which asserted the doctrine of 'Africa for the Africans'. From there he went to Moscow. In the course of this visit the basis was laid for the Comintern to formulate its line on South Africa, the adoption of which, in terms of Comintern rules, was obligatory on the South African Party. This line proclaimed that the main task of the revolution was to struggle for what it called an 'independent native republic (with minority rights) as a stage towards the overthrow of capitalism in South Africa'.

As with the modern-day slogan of black power, the 'Native Republic' slogan was calculated to dissolve traditional African subservience to whites. The attainment of equality was dependent not upon white goodwill but African power: as far as it went a very sound thesis, which not only brought about a revolution in the thinking of Communists but also helped transform the very character of the national movement itself. But the pendulum had swung to an opposite position and the correct balance of a revolutionary strategy was still lacking.

The Party now saw the struggle as a colonial one with Africans of all classes fighting for self-determination and aiming at the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic. This was the era of the so-called 'Black Republic'. Work amongst workers of other sections declined and almost exclusive attention was paid to mobilizing Africans in the struggle for freedom and independence.

This approach obviously had difficulties of its own. Was South Africa a colony in the accepted sense? From whom was independence to be wrested? From the South African ruling class? From the imperialists in Britain who were economically dominant in South Africa? Against whom was the main blow to be directed? ⁸

Thus, although the slogan of a Black Republic was, by and large, a move in the right direction, there were deficiencies in the exposition which, not for the first time in the experience of revolutionary movements, mechanically divided the phases of social change into rigid chronological categories. In the early period the perspective had been one purely of class struggle, led by the organized whites and leading to a workers' and peasants' republic which would then set about solving the national problems. In the later period the emphasis was in an exactly opposite direction; on the achievement of full equality and democratic rights as a distinct phase, after which the search for socialist solutions of South Africa's other ills could begin.

In the 1962 programme the synthesis of these two positions is completed. This synthesis is based on the concept that it is just as impossible to conceive of workers' power in South Africa separated from national liberation, as it is to conceive of true national liberation separated from the destruction of capitalism.

This more fully worked out ideological integration of these two elements in South Africa's strategy of struggle owes a great deal to black Communists like Moses Kotane (the Secretary General of the Communist Party since 1939 and a top-level leader of the ANC since the early forties) and Dr Yusuf Dadoo (Chairman of the Communist Party and one of the most prominent leaders of the Indian community). In the bands of revolutionary activists of their calibre, the practical Party campaigns to mobilize people on issues close to their experience injected an indigenous revolutionary vitality into what had, for some time in the 1930s, remained a somewhat sterile exercise in theory.

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

But if the early Communist Party suffered from the twin legacy of its genesis in the white labour movement and its unreal belief in the immediate prospect of a working-class breakthrough in South Africa, the new national organization remained for some time the prisoner of other limitations. The defeats of armed resistance in the countryside had been piecemeal, made easier by the enemy's manipulation of one tribe against another. The bulk of the African people remained tied to these demoralized tribal groupings; in the urban centres new black forces for change were still in their infancy. It was to be some time before the economic and political processes matured sufficiently to create a common all-African experience of oppression and exploitation which would cut across tribal boundaries.

Understandably the initiatives to develop a single national consciousness out of all the diverse groups and cultures came from the small group of black intellectuals, for whom a wider world had begun to open beyond the narrow confines of tribal allegiances. Writing in IMVO on 24 October 1911, a young Natal lawyer, P. Ka. I. Seme, advocated the formation of a national organization dedicated to creating unity amongst Africans.

'The demon of racialism,' wrote *Seme*,

the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basotho and every other native, must be buried and forgotten. We are one people. These divisions and jealousies are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today.

Those who, on 8 January 1912, responded to this call, took a revolutionary step forward when they created the South African Natives' Congress. Revolutionary? The composition of the delegates and certain of the political platforms adopted may suggest otherwise. Traditional rulers and chiefs and the few black intelligentsia dominated the proceedings and the elected leadership. Inspired by the Westminster constitutional model, an 'upper house' of chiefs was created to share the leadership. Amongst the policies adopted were those 'to encourage a spirit of loyalty to the British Crown and all lawful authority' and 'to bring about better understanding between the white and black inhabitants'.

For many decades after its formation, cap-in-hand nationalism formed 'a part of Congress's ideological stance, even when it was engaging in radical actions. 'Congress fought the 1913 Land Act (the first all-Union statute to legitimize the Reserve system) by sending a deputation to London. In election speeches for one of the African seats in the Cape Provincial Council, one of the Congress Vice-Presidents, the Rev. Walter Rubusana, was still acknowledging on behalf of his people the superiority of the white race. Rallies in 1919 ended in the singing of *Rule Britannia* and *God Save the King*. In 1923 the Congress restricted itself to demanding 'equal rights for all civilized men', the notorious Rhodes formula for assuring white rule while assuaging the liberal conscience. In 1928, when the Communists were already talking of an 'Independent Native Republic' as a stage towards socialism, the Congress upper house of chiefs passed a motion disapproving of the growing 'fraternization' between the ANC and the Communist Party, swayed by the argument 'of the proposer that 'the Tsar was a great man in his country, of royal blood like us chiefs, and where is he now?'

As with the first years of the South African Communist Party, it is facile to judge this phase in the life of the African National Congress by standards of abstract revolutionary formulae, and to allow the examples of moderation and conciliation quoted above to overshadow the organization's overall revolutionary significance.

Bringing the important chiefs together under one national umbrella was a great stride forward, even though their traditions, as resistance leaders were being rapidly overtaken by their integration as minor cogs in the white man's administrative apparatus. It meant that new ideas of non-tribal politics could begin to seep through to the African people, most of whom were still living in a tribal environment. The absence of a militant strategy for the destruction of the white state reflected the reality of black powerlessness; it encouraged a lingering and desperate illusion that divisions between British and Boer imperialism - had they not just fought a war? - could somehow be exploited to win Whitehall support for advancing black aspirations.

But even in those early stages ANC politics were not totally confined to conciliation, deputation and petition. Five ANC leaders were amongst the eight accused (the other three

were members of the ISL) charged with incitement to violence in a trial arising out of the strike by Johannesburg black sanitary workers (the 'bucket strike') in 1918. The ANC was involved in the strike by 40,000 black miners in February 1920, and its rally in support of this strike was broken up by armed force. In March of the same year it organized a passive resistance campaign against the Pass Laws, which led to more than 700 arrests. And in the 1922 white miners' General Strike, Congress sensed more clearly than the Communists the essentially retrogressive implications of the white miners' 'class'-inspired opposition to a dilution of the works Colour Bar.

But it was not until the forties that the ANC outgrew its moderate leaders and began to free itself from the limitations of its formative period. The first leap forward was marked by the 1943 adoption of its 'African Claims' and 'Bill of Rights'. The ANC President-General, Dr A. B. Xuma, declared that Africans had an 'undisputed claim to full citizenship'. But the radical strategy for pressing this claim only emerged four years later, when the ANC adopted its Programme of Action, which asserted an absolute right to black self-determination. A Council of Action was appointed to implement the programme by methods which were to include boycott, strikes, civil disobedience and non-co-operation.

This radicalization resulted from the interaction between changes in the socio-economic structures and a range of subjective factors. The first major spurt towards black urbanization took place in the post-First World War period, when the ANC was not yet ready to break out of its 1912 elitist mould. As a consequence it was effectively eclipsed by the newly-formed Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICU), a trade union movement for African workers which proclaimed direct political aims, including national liberation and the establishment of a socialist South Africa.

The Second World War and the consequent industrial boom accelerated the process of black urbanization. The focus of the struggle for social change, more clearly than ever before, moved to the cities, where the relatively detribalized black proletariat became the vital force in liberation politics. White intransigence was also reaching a climax with the election of a Nationalist Party government in 1948 dedicated to the complete destruction of black opposition and to the reversal of any trend towards African national cohesion.

The militant nationalists in the youth section of Congress (ANCYL) responded to the new conditions. In 1948 a number of the moderates were displaced and men like Tambo, Sisulu and Mandela elected to the executive. Together with Communists in the ANC leadership like Kotane, Marks and Mofutsanyana they won support for more dynamic policies, and more radical political action to back them up. This set the scene for the rousing mass struggles of the fifties, and these struggles, in turn, set the scene for the complete 1961 break with the period in which resistance politics stopped short of violent revolution.

THE MASS STRUGGLES OF THE FIFTIES

Starting from nation-wide strikes on 26 June 1950, to protest at the May-Day police killings of demonstrators against the Suppression of Communism Act,* the fifties were punctuated by an unprecedented series of mass struggles in the urban and rural areas.

**This Act outlawed the SACP, introduced the offence of 'Statutory Communism' (which covered all radical opposition to racism), and gave the executive arbitrary powers to deal administratively with individuals and groups in the whole liberation opposition.*

In 1952 a Defiance Campaign against selected racial laws was launched; in the course of it 8,000 volunteers in every part of the country were jailed for deliberately flouting apartheid measures. Following upon this campaign, a nation-wide movement was launched to convene a 'Congress of the People'. After sixteen months of public campaigning, over 3,000 delegates met in Kliptown, Johannesburg, and, surrounded by armed police, this, the most representative assembly ever held in South Africa, adopted the *Freedom Charter*.

When the COP campaign was announced by Chief Albert Lutuli, the President-General of the ANC, on 8 May 1954, he also called for a separate campaign of resistance to all apartheid measures. Amongst the acts of resistance subsequently advocated was the campaign against the removal of Africans from Sophiatown in 1955 (the only area in Johannesburg in which Africans still enjoyed freehold rights); and the boycott of all Government-controlled schools as a protest against the implementation of the 1953 Bantu Education Act.

On 6 December 1956, 156 leaders (Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites) were arrested in nation-wide swoops and charged with high treason arising out of their involvement in the Congress of the People and other campaigns. The trial was to end in favour of the accused over four years later. 1956 also saw a major women's anti-pass campaign which involved the burning of passes and led to thousands of arrests. In more than one urban centre militant bus boycotts were organized in protest against rising fares, and whole townships (like Alexandra in Johannesburg) marched in daily demonstrations through white suburbs to reach their places of work. For the first time in South African history, national general strikes were called for political purposes. Time and again the big industrial complexes of the Witwatersrand, the Eastern Cape, Natal and, elsewhere were seriously disrupted as hundreds of thousands of black workers went on strike in support of political demands.

In the countryside, too, a new militancy was in evidence. In Sekhukhuniland partly-armed peasants doggedly resisted government attempts to integrate the chieftanship more closely into the Government's apparatus. In Zululand, similar resistance developed. In Zeerust, pass burning by women was followed by a period of violent clashes between people and police. In Pondoland, peasant resistance reached the most impressive heights: the sizeable popular movement set up its own unofficial administrative units, including People's Courts. The movement took its name 'Intaba' (the mountain) from the spot where thousands of peasants assembled illegally to decide their own actions. Many of these peasant eruptions were spontaneous, but all were stimulated by the new climate of organized mass resistance. The Pondo Revolt, for example, had its origins in purely local grievances, but it soon embraced the platform of the African National Congress - the attainment of full political rights for the oppressed majority.⁹

THE PRELUDE TO VIOLENCE

Measured by the yardstick of immediate achievement, each of these campaigns against specific measures failed. The laws selected as the targets of the Defiance Campaign remained

on the statute book. Sophiatown was bulldozed into the ground and replaced by a white suburb which (with typical white insensitivity) was given the name of Triomf (triumph). The attempt by Congress to provide alternative education for African children through cultural clubs eventually collapsed (unofficial schools were outlawed), and the Bantu Education Act was fully implemented. Anti-pass actions did not, in the end, prevent the more intense application of the pass laws. Peasant resistance was to be crushed by emergency legislation and military action. And the strikes did not loosen the hold of white supremacy.

But 'failure' measured in such narrow terms has been the universal experience of every revolutionary movement. Until the moment of successful revolutionary take-over, each individual act of resistance usually fails, and is often crushed; and the radical demands of political action remain unsatisfied. In this sense 'failure' is the constant companion of all political endeavour by a dominated group which is not yet capable of winning power. The rare moment in history which makes possible the final victorious revolutionary assault is a compound of many elements. Amongst the most important of these is a people and a movement with an accumulated heritage of resistance which, through all the immediate 'failures', perpetuates and reinforces the tradition of struggle. It is often only through the experience of these so-called 'failures' that the masses begin to understand the need for conquering state power and thus for revolution. And when the moment of revolution arrives, only a political organization which has been with the people through all their earlier experiences can hope to command their allegiance.

The immediate tactical aims articulated by the Congress movement in the fifties did not yet raise directly the concept of violent revolution, although the demands increasingly centred on the issue of majority rule implicit in the slogan of 'one man one vote'.

Each one of these campaigns was met with varying degrees of violent repression from government forces. Yet the organizers attempted throughout to steer mass activity along non-violent lines, while not shirking the need for constant, direct confrontation.

The decision to prepare deliberately for armed struggle was not taken until the early sixties. Why was the decision taken only then and not in the fifties or forties or thirties? There had never been a moment in history since 1652 when the white ruling class would have given up power without a battle outside the polite arena of the white man's parliament. The answer is that the conditions which make violence a revolutionary imperative had still to mature.

The revolutionary sounding phrase does not always reflect a revolutionary policy, and revolutionary sounding policies not always the springboard for revolutionary advance. Indeed what appears to be 'militant' and 'revolutionary' can often be counter-revolutionary. It is surely a question whether, in the given concrete situation, the course or policy advocated will aid or impede the prospect of the conquest of power... Untimely, ill-planned or premature manifestations of violence impede and do not advance the prospect for revolutionary change and are clearly counter-revolutionary. It is obvious, therefore, that policy and organizational structures must grow out of the real situation if they are not to become meaningless clichés.¹⁰

The answer to the central question of whether violence should have been on the agenda from the early fifties cannot be plucked out of a collection of textbook models. A serious movement poses the idea of revolution seriously only when the objective conditions make it possible to prepare for it. Until then it can articulate the idea of a revolution *ad nauseam* (as many obscure revolutionary groups do to small effect but their own gratification) without advancing *the* revolution one jot.

Conditions for armed struggle are not brought into existence by subjective and ideological activity alone; they grow out of the real situation both locally and internationally. Already by the early fifties, the increasing use of state violence to frustrate every level of organized black protest, stimulated thought and action in the direction of people's counter-violence. The defiance campaign ended in bloody riots in almost every major city. The government's 'shoot first' order to the police led to regular killings of demonstrators and strikers who, more than once, retaliated with rudimentary weapons. In the rural areas (particularly in Pondoland) the struggles against the imposition of Bantu Authorities were accompanied by a great deal of violence. The evidence at the Treason Trial showed that more and more ANC activists were, in their speeches, reflecting the people's groping towards a strategy of retaliation in kind. But the longer-term problem for the revolutionary movement was how to express this changing mood in terms of armed rather than spontaneous violent activities, a people's war rather than mere retaliation or self-defence. For, a number of reasons such a strategy could not be effectively projected during the fifties. Any attempt to do so would have given the regime a pretext (which it clearly sought at the time) for a massive attempt at intimidation. Also, the possibilities of legal and semi-legal mass mobilization by a Congress movement still enjoying a precarious legality had not yet been completely blocked. Both at important levels of the liberation alliance and amongst sections of the people a belief lingered in the potential of mass pressure short of organized force.

In the rest of the continent, black self-rule had not yet become a reality, nor were there in existence friendly external base areas (within reasonable reach) such as proved to be of undoubted importance in the launching and sustaining of armed struggle in countries like Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Without even the prospect of such base areas until the late fifties and early sixties, preparations for modern-type guerrilla struggle seemed unrealistic; and even more so in a situation where, almost uniquely, the black people were absolutely barred from access to weaponry even in the army, or to any modern combatant experience or know-how. The crushing of the tribal armed resistance by means of unequal material odds was still fresh in the collective memory of the African people, and the example of successful armed challenges to colonialism in Africa (as in Algeria) by new techniques of people's war had still not made its impact.

But it was not only the sweep of African decolonization which provided the spur for a more radical strategy. When the movement began to alter the emphasis of its approach, it was reflecting the more militant political climate which it had itself helped bring about inside South Africa by the radical leadership it had provided in the preceding period. The decision of the - Planning Council in 1952 to call for a *defiance* campaign, and not a *passive* resistance campaign, was calculated. It was a conscious attempt to begin promoting defiance of the white state, and was certainly 'not designed to end the system of white supremacy by the sacrifices of its victims'.¹¹

Although immediately directed against selected laws, the longer term purpose was clearly expressed in the letter written by the President and Secretary General of the African National Congress to the government when the campaign was announced:

We firmly believe that the freedom of the African people, the elimination of the exploitation of man by man and the restitution of democracy, liberty and harmony in South Africa, are such vital and fundamental matters that the Government and the public must know that we are fully resolved to achieve them in our lifetime.

Deliberate defiance by selected volunteers was to be the first phase of the campaign. A later phase was to be 'mass action, which as far as possible should broaden out on a countrywide scale...'.¹²

The Congress of the People, the pass-burning campaigns, the demand for majority rule backed by the general political strike: all these were designed to inject a spirit of organized defiance and to show the need of state power for realizing the new vision of South Africa as set out in the *Freedom Charter*. Certainly the ruling class understood the strategy in these terms when it eventually moved to destroy the leadership with the charges of high treason: and, when that miscarried, through the outlawing of the African National Congress.

The conduct of campaigns in a way which would narrow the enemy's opportunities for violent retaliation against a people not yet equipped to fight back was also calculated. A call for physical assault on white power at that stage would have perhaps been answered by the advance guard. But it would have isolated the advance guard from the people and enabled the authorities to pick them off separately. Under these circumstances the call would be stifled before the masses even began to respond.

The emphasis placed by the leaders of the movement on nonviolence no doubt fed those reformist tendencies rooted in the earlier period and may well have given rise to some illusions of possible constitutional advance. Against this danger the movement may not have guarded sufficiently. But the overall strategy can as little be condemned on this score, as can the strategy of violence because of the risks it may run of encouraging adventurism and heedlessness of the political factors. The strategic turning point came in the early sixties, because that was approximately the time when the ruling class made clear its intention of smashing the black opposition totally: that was the time when it finally sealed off all avenues for effective opposition without the clement of organized force.

THE CONGRESS ALLIANCE

The decade of the fifties was also the high point of active collaboration between the mass organizations of the different groups constituting the Congress Alliance. The Communist Party, already outlawed, could not, for obvious reasons, be formally associated with it. The Joint Planning Council which coordinated the Defiance Campaign was followed by a National Consultative Committee (NCC), which consisted of representatives of the African National Congress, South African Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress, South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Congress of Democrats (a white group created on the initiative of the

African National Congress during the Defiance Campaign). The NCC was not a super-executive. As the name implies, it was consultative in character, formed to co-ordinate the efforts of the organizations which were part of it. Critics of this Congress Alliance, such as the Pan-Africanist Congress, echoed government allegations that it was infiltrated by communist elements and saw participation by the minority groups as a dilution of the 'African image'. But on neither count can the charge be sustained.

The leading Communists who participated at the top level of the Congress Alliance - men like Kotane, Dadoo, J. B. Marks and Mofutsenyana - did so in their capacity as long-standing leaders of the national organizations. They did not hide their political affiliations but won their leading status by long and active participation in the organizations in which they had been elected to high positions.

The South African Communist Party saw its role in relation to the national movement as follows:

South African experience has fully proved that a strong Communist Party is vital to the strength and the vigour of the movement as a whole. The Central Committee is vigorously opposed to any conception of counterposing the Party or 'the Communists' to the rest of the movement. We have never considered that the way to play a 'vanguard' role is by 'proclaiming' it or by contesting for positions. In the fight against White supremacy we have no aims separate from those of our non-communist comrades and colleagues in the liberation and working-class movements. Leadership consists in each and every one of our members, in whatever field he may be working, and at whatever level, setting an example of firmness and devotion in the common patriotic struggle against the common enemy. We maintain that our ideology of Marxism-Leninism enables our members to be better Congressites, better trade unionists, better fighters for the freedom of our country. We maintain that the movement as a whole can only gain by our Party Playing its full role as a partner in the liberation alliance.¹³

The charge of minority domination of the Alliance is equally groundless. There are moments

... after 1960 in which co-operation between some organizations which were legal (e.g. SAIC, CPC, COD) and those that were illegal (e.g. ANC) sometimes led to the superficial impression that the legal organizations - because they could speak and operate more publicly and thus more noticeably - may have had more than their deserved place in the leadership of the Alliance.¹⁴

But in general the ANC was undoubtedly the leading organization in the Alliance, and was recognized as such by the other organizations in it.

Rhetoric apart, the PAC was to show in practice that it was not so much opposed to participation by minority groups in the national liberation struggle as to the left ideological positions held by many of the leaders of the SAIC, CPC and COD. Its real objection to the broad alliance was made clear by Leballo (the present PAC leader in exile) in 1958:

The African people do not want to be allied with the Congress of Democrats. They know these people to be leftists and when they want to fight for our rights these people weaken us. This is so because they use campaigns for their own ends and *also because the government will not listen to our requests and demands because of their outlook** (my emphasis).¹⁵

**Soon after its formation, the PAC was to count amongst its leaders and external representatives men like Patrick Duncan - a right-wing member of the SA Liberal Party, who edited Contact which devoted its columns to memorials to 'the victims of Mau Mau terrorism' (27 December 1958), to supporting 'peaceful arrangement of affairs with the ex-colonial powers' (13 December 1958), and to supporting US military action against the Chinese People's Republic (18 October 1958).*

In contrast to those who feared that minority participation was diluting the 'African image' of the struggle, others like the Non-European Unity Movement raised theoretical objection to what it called 'voluntary segregation' of the black community into separate national organizations.

Apart from the Communist Party and SACTU (with class rather than national roots), membership of each of the constituent organizations of the Congress Alliance was effectively restricted to individuals belonging to the different communities. The idea of creating a single mass organization to struggle against white rule accords with the general truth that all black groups suffer from race exploitation. Indeed, the ideologically advanced could have no principled objection to the inclusion even of committed white supporters into one movement. But a single liberation organization cannot be established by 'advanced decisions' from the top, and organizations like the Non-European Unity Movement which attempted to move in that direction never made an impact in the country on any significant scale.

Historically, as we have seen, each group gave birth to its own national movement the explanation for this must be sought in the fact that coloureds and Indians had not only been physically separated from each other and from the Africans, but that the oppression of each group always differed in important respects. There were therefore tendencies towards both unity and diversity - unity in response to the fundamental fact of South African life, white supremacy; diversity because of the differential techniques of domination and exploitation of each group.

Until recently a section of the Coloured and Indian people in the Western Cape had been included in the Common Voters' Roll and there have always been fewer obstacles in the way of the Coloured people engaging in skilled industrial occupations. The most onerous racial laws - e.g. the Pass Laws which restrict freedom of movement - have never applied to Coloureds or Indians. Despite legal obstacles, a small Indian merchant class emerged and has been a significant factor in the life of that community. But apart from a petty trader clement, no analogous group exists amongst Africans or Coloureds. For both the Indian and Coloured communities, with only minimal peasant elements, the land question (except in a very limited sense for trading and residential purposes) had little direct significance.

The different levels of national consciousness, the historical legacy of separate national movements, and even some inter-black prejudices (always encouraged by the government), *

could not be made to disappear, simply by ignoring them or by ideological appeals only. It was only the active collaboration between the national organizations in the campaigns of the fifties which made possible a high level of concerted black action and thus moved the masses towards the achievement of real unity. But later events were to pose new problems in this area.

**In January 1949 clashes between Africans and Indians in Durban led to an estimated 142 deaths and 1,087 wounded.*

In 1960 the African National Congress was outlawed, and the period of repression which followed led to the virtual destruction of the liberation movement's organization. The SAIC and the CPC ceased to exist, either within or outside the country, in the sense of having a defined and functioning leadership with the allegiance of an organized rank and file. The COD disappeared completely. In fact, of the groups ' , which once constituted the Congress Alliance, only the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party continued to operate, each with a recognized leadership and organized rank-and-file organization, even though for some years outside the country only. But the Congress Alliance in the form in which it was known in the fifties ceased to exist. The new period of internal reconstruction which followed therefore posed anew the problem of appropriate organizational forms for a united struggle in new circumstances.

FUTURE LIBERATION UNITY

Broad guidelines of the ANC's approach to unity are set out in its 'Strategy and Tactics'.

Whatever instruments are created to give expression to the unity of the liberation drive, they must accommodate two fundamental propositions: *firstly*, they must not be ambiguous on the question of the primary role of the most oppressed African mass, and, *secondly*, those belonging to the other oppressed groups and those few white revolutionaries who show themselves ready to make common cause with their aspirations, must be fully integrated on the basis of individual equality.

Approached in the right spirit these two propositions do not stand in conflict but reinforce one another. Equality of participation in our national front does not mean a mechanical parity between the various national groups. Not only would this in practice amount to inequality (again at the expense of the majority), but it would lend flavour to the slander which our enemies are ever-ready to spread of a multi-racial alliance dominated by minority groups. This has never been so and will never be so.

Therefore not only the substance but the form of our structural creations must in a way which people can see, give expression to the main emphasis of the present stage of our struggle. This approach is not a pandering to chauvinism, to racialism or to other such backward attitudes. We are revolutionaries, not narrow nationalists. Committed revolutionaries are our brothers to whatever group they belong. There can be no second-class participation in our movement. It is for the enemy we reserve our assertiveness and our justified sense of grievance.

In the councils of the OAU and especially its Liberation Committee, unity in South Africa's liberation struggle is seen by some in terms of a formal alliance between the external missions of the ANC and PAC. But FRELIMO's approach to this question was underlined by its Vice-President, Marcelino Dos Santos, in an interview:

When we speak about unity we mean, in the first place, unity of the people; not just groups who claim to represent the people. Every situation generates numerous individuals and groups who have the ambition to exploit a struggle for their own ends... Unity between organizations only has meaning if they have a real base amongst the people, otherwise it is purely formal and does not serve the interest of a people. Such a kind of unity may even serve to divide the people rather than unite them.¹⁶

The attempts in other parts of the sub-continent to impose a formal unity from the top between contending national movements has, too often, proved abortive and become a drag on real revolutionary effort.

The ANC has emphasized that today, as in the fifties, the building of a democratic front against minority domination in South Africa is a priority but can only be achieved as 'a unity in action, in the field, a genuine unity forged on the anvil of the struggle inside the country'. *

**Memorandum submitted by the ANC delegation to a meeting of the OAU Liberation Committee held in 1974*

How then is such unity to be forged inside the country?

The form of the liberation alliance is not fixed. It shifts and develops to suit not only changing objective conditions, but also ideological changes amongst the masses who are constantly re-educated by political activity. In the present situation it obviously has to take into account a number of new factors. The armed wing of the liberation movement - Umkhonto We Sizwe - is overwhelmingly African in its leadership and composition but admits membership from the other groups. Some of these have already given their lives in the struggle and many others are serving long sentences in South Africa's jails. The needs of a totally underground organization, like today's in South Africa, cannot be met by the forms which grew up when all or most were open and legal. It is obviously both impractical and inefficient to encourage a number of parallel underground organizations of Africans, Coloureds, Indians and the few white revolutionaries, each with its own leadership. Yet a place needs to be found for those revolutionaries from the minority groups who are unconditionally devoted to the liberation struggle and who are ready to participate in underground work.

In the sphere of legal political activity, there have also been new developments which bear on the future of liberation unity. The last few years have witnessed the emergence of such bodies as the Black People's Convention and the South African Students' Organization, which are predominantly African but also have some Coloured and Indian members. They have not yet defined their relation to the older liberation organizations and, generally speaking, have canvassed for support on the basis of a vaguely defined platform of 'black consciousness'. The term does not in itself express a coherent programme, still less an ideology. It is in the first place a response to the arrogance of the white supremacists; and, insofar as it encourages

black assertiveness, its spread is undoubtedly a contribution to the 'psychological' liberation of the black people. Both organizations have attracted a mixture of individuals ranging from militants seeking new ways to express their radicalism, to those who had been associated with the predominantly white moderate Liberal Party.

There has been a recent attempt - hampered by government administrative measures - to revive the Indian Congress which, like the CPC is still legal, although administrative repression of its leaders and activists continues. The CPC itself seems to be completely dormant inside the country. Radical leadership of the Coloured community in the legal sphere has come from the newly-formed Coloured Labour Party which won a majority of seats in the elections to the Coloured Representative Council (yet another of the government's dummy institutions) but was deprived of control by the regime's subterfuge in handing over control to the defeated Federal Party. Most of the leaders of the Coloured Labour Party are committed to a complete rejection of this type of 'representation' and they increasingly emphasize their belief in the common fate of all the black groups.

In the trade union field a new organization - the Black Allied Workers' Union - was formed recently as an offshoot of the Black, People's Convention. From its inception, government and police measures have prevented 'normal' organizational activity, and there appears to be a decline in the rate of its growth. SACTU itself is still a long way from recovering its internal organizational strength, and it is only in the recent period that there is some evidence of revived activity on a relatively small scale. The recent impressive strike wave, involving about 200,000 workers since the beginning of 1972, was, however, semi-spontaneous in character. Although activists of both trade union organizations played important roles in some of the strikes, there was no overall centralized direction.

In the countryside, the legal political stage has been dominated by Bantustan politics; and new ethnic political groups and parties, both official and opposition, are emerging with a wide panorama of attitudes on the future of the Homelands and other issues.

It follows from this rough sketch of the new developments which are taking place, both in the area of underground activity and of legal and semi-legal opposition, that; the old type of Congress Alliance (which in its original form is in any case dead) can no longer satisfy the overall needs of liberation unity.

These needs must obviously be met by a flexible approach which accommodates these new interrelated realities and cannot be expressed in a single rigidly-defined structure. But, structures aside, it seems clear that effective liberation unity means a unity, under the overall leadership of the African National Congress, of *all* the black people, the involvement of the small group of white revolutionaries, and, above all, a recognition of the special role of South Africa's working class.